

# Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD) Fact Sheet

## What is Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease?

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease is a common viral illness that occurs primarily in young children, under five years of age. Occasionally, adults may experience symptoms of HFMD. Illness is caused by viruses in the enterovirus group, which can cause illnesses such as polio. Enteroviruses are very common and cause approximately 10-15 million infections in the United States each year. People with mild illness caused by non-polio enterovirus infection, such as HFMD, typically only need symptom treatment. They usually recover and rarely experience long-term complications.

## What are the symptoms of HFMD?

Symptoms of HFMD include fever, loss of appetite, malaise, and sore throat. HFMD may also cause painful sores to develop inside the mouth approximately two days after other symptoms start. A skin rash typically develops on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. In some cases, the rash may spread to the knees, elbows, buttocks, or genital area.

## Is Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease the same as foot-and-mouth disease?

Foot-and-mouth disease, also called hoof foot-and-mouth disease, occurs in animals such as sheep, cattle, and swine and is caused by a different virus than Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease that is found in humans. More information on foot-and-mouth disease can be found on the [United States Department of Agriculture website](#).

## How is the virus spread?

The viruses that cause HFMD are most commonly spread through the air when infected individuals sneeze or cough. Viruses can also be transmitted through feces, close contact with infected persons, or by touching contaminated objects. Infected persons are most contagious during their first week of illness, but can spread the disease days after symptoms go away.

## Is HFMD dangerous?

HFMD will typically clear up without treatment. In rare cases, HFMD may lead to viral meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and/or spinal cord) and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). Fingernail and toenail loss has been reported in children less than four weeks of age with hand, foot, and mouth disease. However, it is unknown whether fingernail/toenail loss was due to HFMD disease or other illnesses. Nail loss was temporary and nails grew back without treatment.

## What is the treatment for HFMD?

There is no specific treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease. However, some things can be done to relieve symptoms, such as:

- Taking over-the-counter medications to relieve pain and fever (Caution -- Aspirin should not be given to children.)
- Using mouthwashes or sprays that numb mouth pain.

Persons who are concerned about their symptoms should contact their health care provider.

**How can I prevent HFMD?**

There is no vaccine to protect against the viruses that cause hand, foot, and mouth disease. But there are some things you can do to reduce your risk of getting HFMD.

- Proper hand washing is important in preventing the spread of HFMD, especially after changing diapers and using the toilet. For more information on hand washing, visit CDC's website on [How to Wash Hands](#).
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and soiled items, including toys.
- Avoid close contact such as kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or cups with people with hand, foot, and mouth disease.

If you are experiencing symptoms of HFMD, stay home until you recover from the illness.

**How is HFMD diagnosed?**

Laboratory testing is not required to diagnose HFMD. Clinicians usually diagnose HFMD based on symptoms, age of the person and how the rash and sores look.

**Where can I get more information?**

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/>

US Department of Agriculture:

[http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal\\_health/2013/fs\\_fmd\\_general.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/2013/fs_fmd_general.pdf)

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